Crossover Criticality in Ionic Solutions

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To examine the nature of criticality in ionic fluids we have analyzed experimental liquid-liquid coexistence and susceptibility data for various ionic solutions. We show that ionic fluids generally exhibit crossover from Ising behavior asymptotically close to the critical point to mean-field behavior upon increasing the distance from the critical point. This crossover is governed by two physical parameters: a rescaled coupling constant which reflects the strength and range of intermolecular interactions and a "cutoff" length which in a complex fluid appears to be related to a supramolecular structure. Coupling between long-range critical fluctuations and supramolecular ordering may result in the emergence of a multicritical point at which the cutoff length diverges and at which mean-field-like critical behavior is observed. An analogy between crossover critical phenomena in ionic fluids and in polymer solutions is discussed.

The research at the University of Maryland is supported by the U.S. Department of Energy under Grant No. DE-FG02-95ER-14509.